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## Recognising the significance of the 'mainland' presence on Palm Island, past and present

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## Summary

- 1 In this paper, I look at the question of the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the "remote" community of Palm Island. The island, located in North-east Queensland, is host to an Aboriginal population of about 3000 people, with a small non-Aboriginal population of approximately 200. Until the late 1970s, Palm Island operated as an Aboriginal reserve, under the supervision of non-Aboriginal administrators. Lately, Palm Island has come under intense mediatic attention, in the tragic context of the death in custody of Cameron Doomadgee and the subsequent uprising or "riot" of 2004; these events called into question, among other issues, the State of the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (notably the police) on Palm Island. Aboriginal Palm Islanders commonly refer to "the mainland" as the place where non-Aboriginal, or rather white people, live. The "mainland" is commonly represented as rather prejudiced and often hostile towards "the island". On the island, where non-Aboriginal people constitute an ambiguous "minority", interactions between "islanders" and "mainlanders" reproduce, but also often complexify and destabilise the representations which members of both subjective groups may have of each others from further afar.
- 2 Since the 1980s, anthropologists have emphasized the relational way in which Aboriginality, "past and present", is constructed at the crossroads between the experiences and imagination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and as a product of "State effects" (examples include Beckett 1988a, 1988b, Cowlishaw & Morris 1997, Morris 1989, Langton 1993, Lattas 1993, Kapferer 1995, and Povinelli 2002, Cowlishaw 2004, Babidge 2010). Given this acceptance, however, a comparatively limited number

of scholars have specifically undertaken descriptions of actual interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in various contexts (for instance Cowlshaw 2004, Morris 2001, 2005, Trigger 1992, Henry 2012, Collman 1988). In relation to this, even fewer studies have paid detailed attention to non-Aboriginal subjectivities (Lea 2008, Kowal 2011). Moreover, whereas in recent years, "Aboriginal communities" have become the focus of much public debate, including among anthropologists, and especially in relation to the "Intervention", still very little anthropological attention is being paid to the presence of those non-Aboriginal people who come to, or reside in, these communities, and who daily interact with Aboriginal people and constitute an important aspect of Aboriginal people's lives.

- 3 In this paper I thus argue for the need to further study the relationships, in terms of representations, and actual interactions, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in more or less "remote" Aboriginal communities, using "the island" and "the mainland" as starting points to look at Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjectivities and their interrelations.

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